

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS,
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The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Room 3E880
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

A member of my staff, Lieutenant Colonel R. Nicholas Palarino, USA (Retired), and I recently completed our eleventh trip to Iraq since April 2003, visiting Baghdad and Tal Afar. The purpose of our trip was to assess political developments, reconstruction efforts, the training and equipping of Iraqi security forces and most importantly, the health and welfare of US military forces. As with our other trips, this letter provides my observations and recommendations.

Observation: Violence and significant challenges create the temptation among the American public and government leaders to withdraw from Iraq prematurely. We cannot allow this to happen. Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in April 2003, Iraqis have held democratic elections, approved a constitution and elected a National Assembly.

Recommendation: The United States should continue to assist Iraq in achieving political stability, economic growth and a secure environment. It is particularly important we give the Iraqis time to build a coalition government of Sunni, Shia and Kurds. This government must transcend religious lines and unify the nation, not divide it. Ambassador Khalilzad is working tirelessly to assist the Iraqis and given enough time I believe he will succeed.

Observation: Although there has been progress made in reconstruction and economic development, the security situation continues to hamper rebuilding efforts and economic development, and many Iraqis are frustrated over the lack of essential services and jobs.

Recommendation: Continued funding is necessary to complete projects, especially those that improve electricity, water, sanitation and the oil infrastructure. Small projects led by Iraqis, with the assistance of non-governmental organizations (NGO), should be given special preference. These Community Action Programs funded by the US Agency for International Development are making a huge difference.

Observation: There are over 225,000 Iraqi security forces (military, police and border patrol) that are becoming well-trained, equipped and experienced in battle, but these forces lack qualified non-commissioned and mid-level commissioned officers and support forces such as medics and logisticians. It will take time to develop these leaders and support capabilities.

Recommendation: The American public should be informed Coalition forces will be required in Iraq for the foreseeable future to provide support, continued training and to serve as a deterrent against external threats from Syria and Iran.

Observations: Our forces are brave and determined and the equipment we have provided them is world class. However, I am concerned both our military forces and the equipment they use are being over-utilized. Some of our men and women are on their second and third tours of duty in either Afghanistan or Iraq. Talking with some of these soldiers it is obvious they and their families are feeling the stress of deployment in a way I have not noticed in the past. Additionally, primary modes of transportation, such as the C-130 Hercules aircraft, are old, overworked and in some cases unreliable.

Recommendation: Since our troops will be deployed to Iraq, and other locations around the globe for the foreseeable future, the personnel force structure should be adjusted to allow for less frequent deployments and equipment replacement should be accelerated.

When I ask Iraqis what is their greatest fear it is not the bombings and general violence. Their biggest fear is that, “you will leave us.” They express the concern that we have given them a taste of democracy but will not allow them to live it.

These observations and recommendations are offered in the hope they will be of use in crafting the plans and policies needed to move Iraq forward toward the ultimate goal: a democratic Iraq capable of securing domestic peace and maximizing its immense oil wealth, water resources and educated population. This is a goal that can be achieved if we continue to see the progress we have seen in the last eighteen months.

As always, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you more fully. If you, or your staff have any questions please contact me, or Nick Palarino at 202-225-2548.

Sincerely,

Christopher Shays
Chairman

cc. Rep. Tom Davis
Rep. Henry Waxman
Rep. Kenny Marchant
Rep. Dennis Kucinich